

A Tale of Two Cities: EDXC conference in Bratislava and Vienna

Part 2 – Vienna, Austria

After three great days at the EDXC conference in the Slovak capital Bratislava, Sunday afternoon (2nd September) delegates sped westwards by coach to the Austrian capital, Vienna. The two capitals are less than an hour apart by road and once in Vienna, we picked up organiser Harald Süss of the Austrian DX Board (ADXB) who described a few of the sights of the city as we drove slowly towards our hotels.

After a meal at a local Pizzeria (where the ubiquitous Wiener Schnitzel was also on the menu!) there was a chance to check the Viennese airwaves before our radio station visits the next day. As was the case in Bratislava, the local DAB+ multiplex in Vienna is not yet listed in the WRTH. Inside Hotel Zeitgeist, close to the main railway station, 14 DAB+ stations registered on my Philips DA1200 portable from CityMux Wien II (ch 11C 220.352 MHz) though, as we were to learn the following day, ORF and major commercial broadcasters are absent. The DAB+ transmitter is on the tallest skyscraper in Austria, the DC Tower 1, north east of the city centre.

Monday morning, our first visit was to private radio station KroneHit, the most listened to commercial station in Austria. Their studios in Daumegasse were just half an hour's walk from our hotel, though most delegates used the public transport network in Vienna.

We were met by KroneHit's Programme Director for the past ten years, Rüdiger Landgraf, who gave us an introduction to his station and commercial radio in Austria in

general as well as answering our questions. KroneHit is the only commercial station with nationwide rather than just regional coverage: The FM List website shows 168 transmitters across the country for KroneHit! It targets a young and mainly female audience with a Top 40 format plus some specialist music shows and a slogan "Wir sind die meiste music".



Above: KroneHit Programme Director Rüdiger Landgraf explains their on-air studio operation.

However, commercial radio came very late and reluctantly to Austria, first becoming legal in 1998 and only spreading across the country in 2004. Prior to that, cross-border commercial stations could be heard in Vienna, such as Radio SiTy from Slovakia. Or pirate stations also were an alternative to ORF – Rüdiger worked for one such pirate in Vienna, “103.3”, before his career in licensed commercial radio began in 1991.

Nowadays, KroneHit itself can be heard in neighbouring countries e.g. in western Hungary on 102.9 MHz from the 1523m high Sonnewendstein site above the Semmering Pass. Rüdiger told us that some Austrian radio stations are subsidised such as non-commercial Radio Orange (“the only Free Radio in Vienna”) which receives grants from Vienna city and the EU. Orange’s schedule includes Radio Afrika International, who some remembered being heard via Radio 1476’s evening broadcasts from the ORF MW site at Bisamberg, which was reactivated in 1997 but closed in 2008.

It was clear Rüdiger is no fan of DAB when asked why KroneHit was not on the DAB+ multiplex in Vienna. He said it was too late to adopt DAB and quoted the example of Norwegian stations such as NRK P3, who have lost many listeners by migrating from FM to DAB. So, as we had noticed already, there are no major commercial or public ORF stations on DAB in Vienna. His

station KroneHit, prefers streaming online or through smart speakers or via its “KroneHit Smart App”. It also operates quite a number of online only digital stations.



Above: (left to right) Alexander Beryozkin, DJ Christian Mederitsch and Fredi Hahn.

We then split into two groups for a tour of the KroneHit studios with Rüdiger and colleague, Fredi Hahn. On air in the studio for the mid-morning slot was DJ Christian Mederitsch (*photo above*) who took time out to chat whilst tracks were playing. KroneHit has different regional networks of

transmitters, which can carry different advertising breaks, but all carry the same national programme on FM.

A short walk then U-Bahn train ride took us to the home of national public service radio, Österreichischer Rundfunk, ORF Funkhaus in Argentinierstrasse, in the Wieden district near the city centre. The Funkhaus (Broadcasting House) was erected between 1935 and 1938 for the original state public broadcaster, RAVAG. The original plans for the building by architects Aichinger and Schmid were taken over by Clemens Holzmeister resulting in the monumental art deco frontage, little changed in the past 80 years.

Funkhaus in 1937

RAVAG however was dissolved after the Anschluss to Nazi Germany in 1938, replaced by German-controlled Reichsender Wien. In early 1945, the broadcasting house was damaged by Allied bombing and Reichsender Wien made its last broadcast on 6 April



1945. A new Radio Wien was founded with a temporary transmitter on the roof of the Funkhaus as the retreating Germans had blown up the transmitter at Bisamberg. The Funkhaus however was in the Soviet occupied sector of Vienna whilst other areas of the country had their own radio stations set up by their occupying Allied forces. The Funkhaus was designated a listed building in 1999. One appropriate more recent addition in front of the Funkhaus is a 4-metre high colourful sculpture by Johann Garber of an ear, *Das Ohr*, added in 1997 (photo right).

Our guide met us in the foyer and she first took us to one of two large music studios (Studios 2 & 3) whose tall walls are beautifully decorated still with romantic painted scenes from the 1930s. These studios (and the Grosse Sendesaal below) are trapezium shaped to improve acoustics.

We then visited the studios of ORF's "alternative mainstream" station FM4,



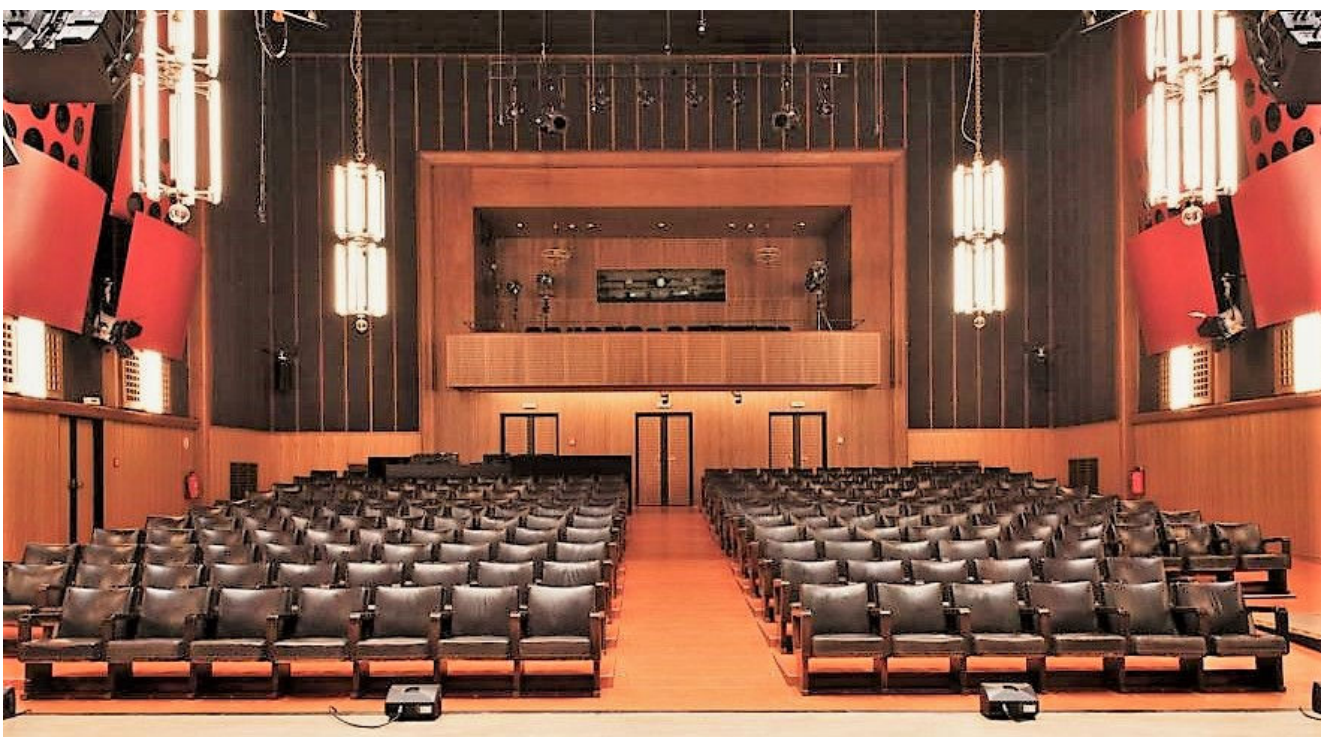
which targets a youth audience with alternative music and with many programmes in English. Set

up in 1995, FM4 originally was only broadcast evenings and overnight as it shared frequencies with English language Blue Danube Radio (which had been established for the United Nations community in Vienna). The two stations merged in 2000 (hence the English programming) and FM4 became 24/7. On air presenter during our visit was Riem Higazi (*right*), originally from Egypt, who also does voice-overs and is a producer at the station, and she chatted to us in the rather crowded and warm studio while music was playing out.



ORF Funkhaus is currently also home to national Österreich 1 (Ö1), regional station Radio Wien and the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra. The

orchestra often plays live concerts in the impressive Grosse Sendesaal (large broadcasting hall) which we saw next, whose large stage is backed by a huge pipe organ (reminiscent of, and equally impressive as, the one seen at Slovak Radio in Bratislava three days previous). The original leather seats are still in situ, fixed, not hinged so as to create no disturbance during concerts. (*view from the stage below*)



Two smaller studios completed our tour, including fixtures for making sound effects during radio dramas such as closing doors and gravel for walking on.

We thanked our guide and then met Professor Wolf Harranth in the impressive Funkhaus foyer. He would take us on a walking tour of some of the sights of central Vienna. No time for a coffee in the Radio Café and sadly the ORF shop is now online only <https://shop.orf.at/en> for those who wanted a retro-radio moneybox or testcard design umbrella!

Wolf Harranth is known to many of us as the presenter of Radio Austria International's weekly DX programme, Austrian Shortwave Panorama from 1975, is also a radio amateur and is now curator of the DocuFunk QSL archive (see below). In the Funkhaus foyer, he lambasted the decision by ORF in 2016 to sell the historic broadcasting house we were stood in, and we had to agree it seemed strange to have sold such a historic and cultural landmark. Despite protests from some ORF staff together with musicians, writers and others, the building has been sold to the Rhomberg Group, although ORF will somehow retain the use of the Radiokulturhaus concert halls. The aim of the move is to consolidate ORF in one centre at Königlberg on the outskirts of Vienna. The move to ORF Zentrum is criticised as it is remote from the cultural heart of the city and with buses the only public transport to the site. The move is still to take place, maybe with ORF staying in the Funkhaus at least until the end of 2021.



Wolf is very knowledgeable about Vienna and its architecture and his tour took in the magnificent St Charles Church, the semi-circular colonnade erected as a war memorial for the Soviet Red Army losses in capturing Vienna in April 1945, the Vienna concert hall and St Stephens cathedral.

Having expressed an interest in the **DokuFunk QSL Archive**, Wolf Harranth very kindly offered to take Dave Kenny and myself to see it at first hand. Located in a large industrial warehouse on a trading estate in the southern suburbs of Vienna, it took around an hour to reach from central Vienna, involving a busy suburban train followed by a short bus connection and walk. At the entrance door sits a large mast base from the Bisamberg MW transmitter site, built in 1933 but demolished in 2010.

DokuFunk was set up 25 years ago as the International Foundation QSL Collection, an archive to research and document the history of radio communications, originally run entirely by volunteers. It covers international broadcasting and amateur radio as well as Austrian broadcast history.

DXers may have heard of it as a place to donate their precious QSL collections where they would be archived forever. However, Wolf told us that they had been inundated with amateur radio QSL collections. By comparison there were far fewer broadcast QSLs being left to the collection. And although more amateur cards were not really wanted, they continued to arrive in vast quantities - there was a huge backlog in processing them.



Nowadays much of DokuFunk's principle work is involved in archiving both audio and printed archives, from the Austrian public broadcaster ORF. These include periodicals and scripts from the early days of Austrian radio when no recordings exist.

However, ORF wanted to take over the warehouse (which it owns) for storing vehicles, so DokuFunk was having to move premises, a monumental task. Space has been allocated to them at another location, but the task of cataloguing and relocating the entire archive seems overwhelming. In the basement we saw crates of documents which were awaiting processing, and with documents continuing to arrive all the time there was quite a backlog. Upstairs archivists steadily scan and catalogue the historic material, all of which is stored digitally. DocuFunk has a website (with English option) at: <http://dokufunk.org/> with explains on the home page what donations of cards etc they would accept. And there is a video about DocuFunk (in German but with English subtitles) at <https://vimeo.com/222005450> in which Wolf Harranth proudly states: "Everything that is here, would not exist anymore, if it was not here". Thanks to Wolf for taking time out to show us around DocuFunk!

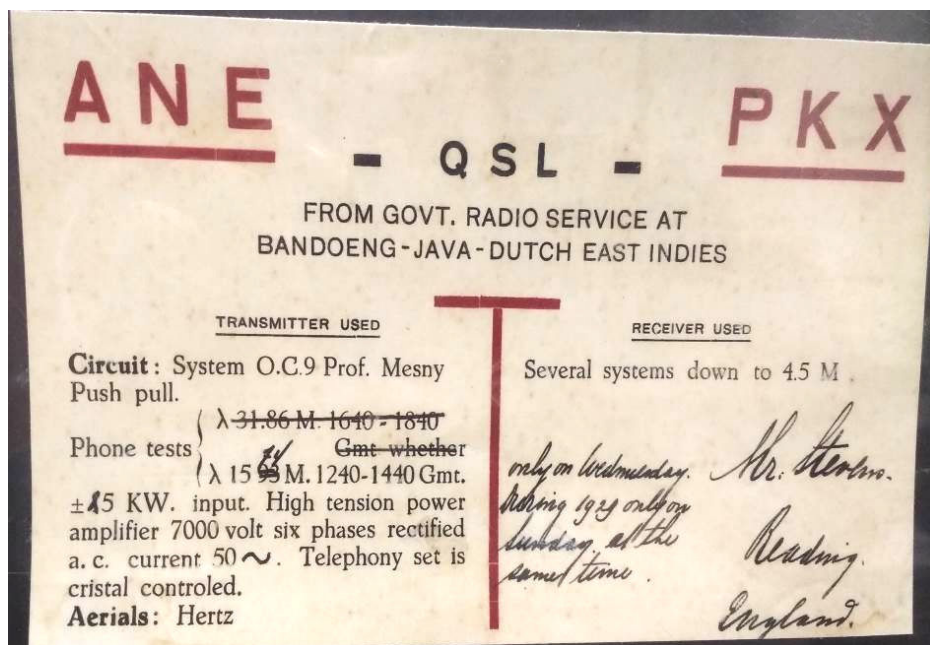
Below, some QSL cards from the Dokufunk, Vienna archives:



1930s QSL from
CR7AA
in Lourenço Marques,
Portuguese East Africa
(now Maputo
Mozambique)

*A Radio Nederland PCJ
QSL from the late 1940s
showing the remarkable
wooden rotating beam
aerials at Huizen. (They
were constructed in 1937
and demolished in 1940)*





A 1929 QSL sent to a DXer in Reading, England from the radio-telegraph station at Bandoeng in the Dutch East Indies (West Java Indonesia) It verifies a phone (voice) test on 15.74 metres (18820 kHz)

Two more days were spent in Vienna sightseeing, including the must-do ride on the historic Riesenrad (ferris wheel) in the Prater amusement park (*below*), as featured in the Third Man film!



Many thanks to the organisers for such an enjoyable EDXC conference in Bratislava and Vienna!

(© Alan Pennington and
British DX Club October 2018)

